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SUBJECT: DARFUR: S/E NATSIOS DISCUSSES POLITICAL PROCESS
WITH P-5 AMBASSADORS

¶1. (SBU) In a July 13 meeting in Khartoum with ambassadors representing the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Special Envoy Natsios provided a concise analysis of the challenges facing the Darfur political process and exchanged views on the role of the African Union (AU), civil society, and traditional leaders in peace negotiations. S/E Natsios voiced his fear of the potential "Somaliaization of Northern Sudan" as "centrifugal forces pulling the country apart began to accelerate" if Darfur is not solved in the near future. While the National Congress Party (NCP) preferred a "certain level" of conflict to maintain its control over the country in the absence of popular support, localized violence could explode. He cited recent "revolts" and unrest in Nubian, Masseriya, and Beja areas as examples of this trend.

¶2. (SBU) S/E Natsios described five points that the UN/AU-led political process would need to address in the coming months: 1) The chaos caused by the proliferation of armed movements lacking incentives to maintain loyalty and the determination of which movements should be included in the process; 2) The radicalization of internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, IDPs' increasing alienation from the rebels' political leadership, and the "risk of explosion" in the camps where armed elements backed by the rebels and the Sudanese Government operated; 3) The inclusion of civil society and traditional leaders, which are disconnected from the rebel political leaders and field commanders and disdained by Khartoum, in the political process; 4) The rift between the political leaders and the field commanders in Darfur; and 5) The timeframe to find a political solution to the Darfur conflict before the 2009 national elections, which could destabilize the country in the absence of a peace settlement for Darfur.

¶3. (SBU) Following S/E Natsios' analysis, the UK Ambassador highlighted the importance of involving "genuinely representative" elements of Darfur civil society and traditional leaders, including Arab groups, in the political process. She underscored the importance of balancing the timeframe for an agreement to ensure that the Darfur conflict did not disrupt the elections with the necessity that the agreement be "sustainable." The French Ambassador concurred that such a role for traditional leaders was important but noted that the rebellion in Darfur, led largely by youth, had broken out in 2003 as a reaction not only to policies originating from Khartoum but out of a frustration toward Darfur's local elite. She said that the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA), which had been reached between the NCP and the traditional authorities in Eastern Sudan, was failing in part because the youth did not support it.

¶4. (SBU) The Chinese Ambassador asked for S/E Natsios' views on the role of the AU in the political process and questioned whether it had the ability to have a positive impact. The AU suffered from a lack of capacity in its political operation and a distrust of key players, such as AU Envoy Salim Ahmed Salim and AU Head of Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) Implementation Sam Ibok, among the rebel groups that dated from the Abuja talks, according to S/E Natsios. The AU was making progress in addressing the political sensitivities, however, and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) leader Khalil Ibrahim had met Salim recently in a gesture of goodwill.

¶5. (U) S/E Natsios did not have the opportunity to clear this message before his departure from Sudan.

FERNANDEZ